

SPEAKER'S NOTES FOR CLR MPHONGA PARKS TAU, EXECUTIVE MAYOR OF JOHANNESBURG AT A COMMEMORATIVE EVENT FOR THE LATE PRESIDENT NELSON MANDELA

University of the Witwatersrand

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While browsing through the many obituaries and commentaries that have been written about Tata Nelson Mandela over the past week, my eyes fell on a picture of the Wits Law Class of 1949.

Standing right at the back on this group picture, is the unmistakably tall figure of a young Nelson Mandela: the only black student among a group of 15. In the front middle-row, with both hands jutting into his pocket, is the then Dean of the Law Faculty, Prof H R Hahlo, who found his own level of fame – or, perhaps infamy – through his interaction with this young man from a rural village in the Transkei.

For it was Prof Hahlo who famously refused Madiba permission to sit for a supplementary examination to complete his LLB-degree and advised him to study in another academic field because: “...**blacks and women do not have the mental agility to master law.**”

Who knows how the history of the world might have turned out if the professor allowed him to continue his law studies? Thank God, this singular expression of short-sighted racism, inadvertently provided us with a leader who transcended racism, transcended gender discrimination; reached across every race and creed and believe, and became the bridge which took South Africa from the brink of racial conflagration into a united, non-racial, non-sexist democracy.

The Honourable Deputy Chief Justice and Chancellor, Judge Dikgang Moseneke, Mr Vice-Chancellor, members of the Senate and Convocation, our distinguished leaders of the struggle and architects of the new South Africa, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

I am in awe to be standing here, in the presence of people such as our Freeman of the City (Uncle Kathy Kathrada), whose friendship and wise counsel, sustained Madiba throughout his life; the illustrious Adv. George Bizos, who not only defended him in crucial times but served as a friend, a comrade and an intellectual soundboard, since their first meeting, right here on the Wits campus;

And also our illustrious Chancellor and Deputy Chief Justice, Dikgang Moseneke, who met him on Robben Island as a young man of 15, and who later played such a decisive role as one of the framers of our Constitution, the driving force behind the first democratic elections and as a Trustee of the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund.

It is to Madiba's eternal credit that he never held a public grudge against his alma mater and that Wits as an institution, eventually also recognised its mistake when it awarded him an honorary doctorate in 1991. As Prof Habib so succinctly stated in a recent tribute: "**He was Wits' greatest son. You were of us, but you belonged to the world.**"

Ladies and gentlemen,

Over the past few days we have listened to countless tributes and eulogies about Madiba's extraordinary life. We saw moving images of him a leader, as president, as revolutionary, as global icon and revered peacemaker, as family man and as the father of the nation. We read again his writings and his speeches and, once again, became aware of the depth and the wisdom contained in his pronouncements.

One of his most often quoted statements pertains to education in which he said: "**Education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world.**" Let us not forget that these profound words were not delivered in a speech to academics and chancellors and judges of the high court – but to a group of high school students from Meadowlands who accompanied him on a visit to the Planetarium on this campus.

Mr Chancellor,

The City of Johannesburg is honoured to be part of this tribute to our departed President and also to express our thanks and appreciation for the contribution that this institution is making to the continuation of his legacy through the collection and preservation of historical documents and records, the institutes and facilities named after him and the scholarships awarded in his memory.

At the time when Nelson Mandela walked on this campus in the middle to late 1940s Wits was an important incubator of political thought. This institution, in no small measure, shaped the minds and thinking of the generation which led the South African revolution and cemented the eventual democratic transition.

I have already mentioned Advocate Bizos and Mr Kathrada, but this is also an institution that gave South Africa Joe Slovo and Nhtato Motlana, Ruth First and Helen Suzman, Arthur Chaskalson and Ismail Meer, Nadine Gordimer and Aggrey Klaaste, Robert Sobukwe and Phillip Tobias – another recipient of a high civic honour awarded by the City.

Caught in the crucible of the transition towards some of the most extreme apartheid laws which not only rendered communities aside and destroyed families but also sought to extinguish the last flames of critical thinking and independent thought Wits managed to stay afloat and remained a beacon of academic excellence, free speech and – despite the occasional aberrations – resistance against tyranny and oppression.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In his moving obituary for Nelson Mandela the writer, poet and cultural activist, Mandla Langa called on us to make our peace with the fact that “**there will never be another Mandela**” **nor will there “ever again be a Mandela Moment”** -- in reference to the role he played as a conciliator between people from diverse background, opinions and political persuasions.

The question we thus have to answer once we have emerged from this period of deep grief and mourning – is how each of us, on our own terrain, continues the legacy of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela.

Within the City of Johannesburg we have, for instance embarked on an ambitious programme to change the legacy of the spatial patterns imposed by decades of apartheid planning through which the majority of black residents were shunted to the periphery – far away from jobs, economic opportunities, social and cultural facilities.

We are doing it on the basis of a system of Transit-oriented Development, a modern spatial planning concept which has also been introduced, to a lesser or greater degree, in cities such as Vancouver, Hong Kong, Melbourne and the San Francisco Bay Area.

Through, what we are calling, Corridors of Freedom we are establishing a series of mixed-use boulevards connecting key economic growth points in the City with the public transport networks serving as the arteries.

Through these corridors, we will be meeting many of our developmental objectives. We will bring people closer to work opportunities. We will cut down on travel time between home and work and retail opportunities.

We will create a healthy sense of community where people have access to quality schools, clinics, police stations and leisure opportunities, close to their residences. A reduction in travel time will enable parents to spend more quality time with families and children, leading to a reduction in social ills, crime, truancy and substance abuse.

In short, ladies and gentlemen, our vision is to create sustainable human settlements that are more than mere piles of bricks and mortars. In our housing development and in our future growth patterns, we want to truly reflect the values of Johannesburg's aspiration to be a world-class African city.

I mentioned this initiative at length, because I believe there are ample opportunities for critical cooperation between the City and the academic community of Johannesburg – especially here at Wits. We are, for instance, extremely grateful for the high level input we received from members of your institution, when we recently developed our long term strategic vision, the 2040 Growth and Development Strategy.

Within the City, we have established the Johannesburg Innovation and Knowledge Exchange as a unit to drive innovation and liaise with universities, tertiary institutions, research organisation and private sector foundations on joint projects aimed at a culture of excellence and best practice.

I am hopeful that under the leadership of Prof Habib, Dr Randall Carolissen and Prof Mamokgethi Phakeng, the relationship between the City of Johannesburg and Wits will grow and deepen into a highly productive exchange of information and ideas.

Early next year, the City will be hosting the global C-40 summit during which leaders from the world's most prominent cities, academics and civic activists, will meet in Johannesburg to discuss the impact of climate change.

I have no doubt that this is an area of science where, we as a city, can greatly benefit from the accumulated research, knowledge and scientific modelling done across faculties at your universities.

Similarly, I can foresee greater cooperation in areas such as urban planning, transport systems, acid mine drainage, clean energy and green technology, urban agriculture, crime prevention and many more.

Mr Chancellor,

I think we were all touched by President Barack Obama's remarks at the Mandela commemoration when he recalled the fact that Madiba's life and example inspired him to enter public service while he was a law student at Harvard.

In his biography, "*Conversations with Myself*", Pres. Obama writes: "***His sacrifice was so great that it called upon people everywhere to do what they could on behalf of human progress. In the most modest of ways, I was one of those people who tried to answer his call.***"

I trust that the poignant events of the past few days and opportunities we had, to reflect on the life and ideals of Tata Mandela, will cause a similar stirring for public service amongst a current generation of students – also here at Wits.

I am looking forward to young men and young women expressing a desire and commitment to meet the challenge laid down by Mr Mandela in a speech he made in Parliament in 1994, to commemorate the first 100 days of democratic governance. In this, he said, we need to ensure that the spirit of public service permeates to all levels of work: "***We have to ensure that the public service becomes a servant of the public in fact.***"

Mr Chancellor,

I am delighted to note the presence of one of our illustrious Johannesburg residents, the fellow Nobel Prize Winner and celebrated author, Nadine Gordimer. I was especially moved by her tribute after the passing of her long-time friend and colleague in which she said: "***Nelson Mandela was not a figure carved in stone but a tall man, of flesh and blood, whose suffering has not made him more vengeful but still more human.***"

While we express our grief, let us remember the humanity of Wits' greatest son and Johannesburg's most illustrious resident. Let us build on this legacy, as we create a better university, a responsive city and a new generation of public servants and officials dedicated to the improvement of the lives of all our people.

I thank you.

